

Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee

July 19, 2006

Meeting Summary

Attendees: William Bronrott, Deborah Brown, Larry Cole, Gerald Donaldson, Mike Flood, Robin Jeweler, Sue Morris, Sylvia Morrison, Deborah Snead, Lisa Rother, Matthew Greene, Fred Lees.

Delegate Bronrott chaired the meeting in Bill Frick's absence.

Introductions were made as we had three new members joining us for the first time – Gerald Donaldson, Mike Flood, and Robin Jeweler.

Agenda item 2: Discussion of PSAC background and purpose.

Matt was asked to begin the discussion and explain why he included this item on the agenda. He explained that tracking progress and providing advice on implementing all recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel had some limitations. These included the Committee having time enough to learn about progress for so many and so varied activities. He questioned whether this kind of detailed exercise would adequately reflect changes in the pedestrian environment, both for safety and for mobility. Mike Flood asked about written progress reports and it was noted that the last detailed reporting of progress on the Blue Ribbon panel recommendations was from March 2005. Deborah Brown added that success would be measured in the "feel of a place" and how a pedestrian would perceive the environment. Gerry Donaldson asked if any studies had been done documenting changes in the environment and peoples' behavior. Larry Cole said that DPWT had studied the new countdown signals and that the findings were positive, in that even though a greater percentage of pedestrians were observed stepping off the curb after the flashing DON'T WALK came on, a greater percentage completed their crossing before the solid DON'T WALK came on. Therefore, a safer situation resulted. Fred Lees noted that traffic calming studies had also been conducted and had shown success in reducing vehicle speeds.

The issue of workloads came up during this discussion and Delegate Bronrott asked about the backlog of studies in DPWT. Fred thought that there were perhaps seventy active requests to consider some level of traffic calming around the County, plus numerous other studies affecting the pedestrian environment. **Much of the discussion about creating a safer environment revolved around complex traffic engineering concepts, which led Robin Jeweler to note the need for simple ways to communicate these concepts to the general public. She offered to work on this issue with Fred and they will follow up on this idea.** Lisa Rother noted that communicating pedestrian safety and mobility related ideas to the public could be a role for PSAC members to play. Staff can provide background information and handout materials and members could speak to various civic organizations.

The issue of the PSAC sunset date of July 2007 came up for discussion next. Lisa noted that the PSAC should decide if and how it wants to continue and then find ways of getting this message to the new Executive and Council. Delegate Bronrott said that he believes it is important for the Committee to continue. Several comments were then made as to the importance of making sure the new Executive and Council maintain pedestrian safety as a high priority. This discussion was centered not on identifying certain improvements that could be made within County agencies, but rather on providing more total resources to all agencies associated with implementing the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations. Sue Morris recalled the December 2005 meeting with Mr. Duncan and noted that it's important not only to measure what has been accomplished, but also what remains to be accomplished from the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations. Larry noted that this effort to influence the Executive was not accompanied by an effort to reach out to the Council. **(Later in the meeting it was agreed that staff would provide schedule information related to the budget process to help identify crucial communication opportunities.)** Sue then wondered whether the upcoming Friendship Heights outreach meeting might provide an opportunity to spread the idea that pedestrian issues countywide need more resources committed to them. Mike said that he thought we needed a strategic assessment of the Blue Ribbon Panel Report. This got some positive responses. Then it was suggested that all needs should be identified and compared against proposed capital and operating budgets as those are developed. Lisa noted that to give our recommended allocation to the Council of Governments (COG) (about \$45,000 vs. the \$10,000 given in FY06) for the annual Street Smart media campaign would mean getting started now on getting the additional money into the budget. This led to some discussion of the effectiveness of the Street Smart campaign overall. There seemed to be general agreement that public awareness campaigns were an important part of the overall three "Es" strategy, but that Street Smart may not be intensive enough or targeted well. **Sue offered to help Lisa work on the Street Smart Campaign.** Everyone agreed that all three "Es" were important. Delegate Bronrott noted that in previous years there were more educational efforts.

Some frustration was noted by Delegate Bronrott about the overall state of the effort on behalf of pedestrian safety and mobility. Mike noted the difficulty in changing institutional mindsets and Delegate Bronrott noted that the influence of the Executive and Council has been very helpful in creating change in some of our agencies.

The conversation turned again to specifics and Sue mentioned pedestrian flags. Gerry Donaldson first noted his agreement that a strategic assessment is needed now and that it should include what's been done and what remains. He said we need a work plan. Then, in response to Sue, he offered some detailed information on flag use and suggested that the County might try an experimental roll out and testing of some sort of hand held reflective device. **(He later offered to investigate this idea further and report back to the Committee in Sept.)** There were some concerns about the false sense of security that can be imparted by such devices.

Fred offered that he would like to see some global, policy level advocacy by the PSAC. He talked about how difficult it was to change the culture at the State Highway Administration during his fifteen years there. In relation to changing culture, Gerry asked whether DPWT had ever experimented with longer pedestrian crossing times. Fred

responded that a few intersections had been timed slower, using 3.5 feet per second walking speeds vs. 4.0 feet per second. He offered that DPWT was now in the process of putting together some language to explain their signal timing practices. Some general discussion ensued about the need for longer crossing times for seniors and others and also about the traffic management difficulties that could arise by allowing longer crossing of roads such as 355 in Friendship Heights. Robin asked whether there weren't best practices available to guide work at DPWT. Fred explained that there were, but that everything is a balancing act, that there are tradeoffs to be considered in most decisions. Gerry, who contributed significantly to the writing of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), then explained the MUTCD hierarchy of standards and practices. Larry noted that traffic and safety responsibilities are often located together in transportation agencies and that traffic concerns end up dominating. He said that he would like to see a separate position in DPWT under the director that would be responsible for safety. Mike also noted that he thought that the priority in Montgomery County was for traffic and vehicle flows over other concerns. Delegate Bronrott said that he heard that traffic calming doesn't sacrifice vehicle flows or create congestion. He asked whether that was a myth. Fred said no, it was not a myth. Delegate Bronrott mentioned the widespread concern over pedestrian crossing times. This led into more detailed discussion of signal timing and how it can affect congestion on major roads. (The County has an "actuated" signal system. This means that traffic signals respond to the numbers of vehicles on the road, even during the middle of a cycle, and adjust accordingly. This means that a full pedestrian countdown can not be used since the total time allowed for crossing isn't known at the beginning of the walk cycle.) Mike noted the example of Middleburg Virginia, where the town chose to have longer pedestrian crossing times on its main street with the tradeoff of increased vehicle trip times through town. **Gerry offered to do some research on signal timing and to report back to the Committee.**

Mike offered to work with Matt on conducting a strategic assessment of the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations. Sue asked to be included in this effort as well.

Item 3 – Outreach meetings.

The Friendship Heights "Dialogue on Pedestrian Safety Solutions" is scheduled for Monday, September 25 at 7:00 PM.

There was a brief discussion on turning out the maximum number of people by advertising early and to as many organizations in the area as possible. Deborah Snead will assist staff in getting the word out. PSAC will be the host. We will use a moderator. Save-the-date messages will begin going out within a week and we'll schedule an event planning meeting shortly. Those involved in the planning for the Friendship Heights meeting include Bill Bronrott, Deborah Snead, Linda Katz (you were volunteered!), and Bill Frick. Other PSAC members will be offered the opportunity to join in.

4. There were no items to discuss under New Business/Citizen Concerns and the meeting was adjourned at 8:45.